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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA CONFLICT UPDATE - Q4'06

REF: A. 06 BOGOTA 3814

[1](#)B. 06 BOGOTA 7383  
[1](#)C. 06 BOGOTA 9448  
[1](#)D. 06 BOGOTA 11488  
[1](#)E. 06 BOGOTA 10214  
[1](#)F. 06 BOGOTA 4983

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood  
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (S) Greater COLMIL assertiveness kept the FARC on a broadly defensive footing. Still, the FARC opportunistically struck vulnerable COLMIL units in Meta and Catatumbo and attacked police in strategic coca growing areas previously dominated by paramilitaries. The ELN continued to decline, making no attacks on the COLMIL in the quarter. COLMIL offensives focused on multiple hot zones in the center, north, and southwest of Colombia, stretching limited resources and limiting COLMIL capabilities elsewhere. After shifting intelligence resources to mid-level targets, the COLMIL took down twenty FARC/ELN front and militia leaders. End Summary.

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'Point Man' War Against an Evasive FARC  
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[1](#)2. (S) The Colombian military continued more aggressive patrolling, forcing the FARC into smaller units to avoid head-on combat and protect their leaders. FARC chieftain Manual Marulanda issued unprecedented guidance to his troops on avoiding capture by the COLMIL -- indicating the FARC's concern over its now more limited room for maneuver. The FARC surrounded their leaders with multiple rings of security, limiting COLMIL contact to 'picket lines' of FARC sentries and preventing it from closing in on FARC leaders. This 'point man' war typically yielded only one or two guerrilla kills per encounter. Smaller volumes of ammunition found on captured or killed FARC suggest FARC supply lines were also constrained.

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FARC Attacks on Public Forces  
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[1](#)3. (C) The quarter's main terrorist attacks were against public forces, not civilians. The FARC set off a series of

car bombs at military sites, including a COLMIL academy in Bogota. In Tierradentro (southern Cordoba), three FARC fronts laid siege to a rural police post in a formerly AUC-controlled center of coca cultivation, killing 17 officers. The FARC also opportunistically attacked whenever COLMIL units made themselves vulnerable. In Catatumbo (N. de Santander) bordering Venezuela, an area of established narcotrafficking corridors, guerrillas ambushed a platoon of a newly established Army brigade, killing 17 soldiers. On Christmas Eve outside La Julia (Meta), 14 soldiers were killed in what appears to have been a FARC ambush. Still, the fourth quarter of 2006 was far less lethal than the same period of 2005 and represented a sharp downscaling of FARC actions compared to prior years.

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ELN: Ever Weaker  
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¶4. (C) The ELN continued its decline, launching no attacks in the quarter. Peace Commissioner Luis Carlo Restrepo told us only two percent of attacks ("a statistical error") against the COLMIL in 2006 were perpetrated by the ELN. Demobilizations and arrests of ELN guerrillas outnumbered battle losses, as fronts fragmented. The ELN suffered battle losses from COLMIL offensives in the northeastern departments of Norte de Santander and Casanare and from feuding with the FARC over control of nearby Arauca on the Venezuela border.

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Combat Focus Areas  
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¶5. (U) Heavy combat and high FARC casualties continued in Antioquia Department (ref C), where a diversified economy, good infrastructure, and major narcotrafficking routes supported several FARC fronts against an aggressive COLMIL division. In a single week, 17 members of the FARC 9th front were killed. Combat increased generally across Colombia's north (Cordoba, Bolivar, Sucre, and La Guajira departments), reflecting the continuing competition between FARC and COLMIL to fill the post-AUC vacuum. In Cordoba, the Army and Air Force launched massive operations against the FARC front responsible for the Tierradentro attack. At least a dozen guerrillas were killed, including the FARC leader, and a host of camps and caches were destroyed.

¶6. (U) In the COLMIL's main effort area of Joint Task Force Omega (JTF-O), combat tempo slowed due to a shift in forces to protect cities over the holidays, the FARC's heavy casualties mid-year, and the consolidation of COLMIL presence in the area. Combat heated up in Caqueta, however, perhaps due to COLMIL pressure on neighboring Meta. A police sweep against the Teofilo Forero Mobile Column (TFMC) yielded 25 arrests and at least a dozen takedowns. A similar increase was evident at the conjunction of Tolima, Huila, Valle, and Cauca departments, as two Army divisions launched convergent offensives against FARC fronts. Finally, following waves of violence against police in the cities of Buenaventura and Cali, the CNP moved its command headquarters to Cali and undertook intensive operations to root out FARC militias and narco-gangs. After the capture of a militia leader, 45 of his rank and file demobilized en masse.

¶7. (U) Along borders with Venezuela and Ecuador, the FARC and ELN were increasingly active, but combats were fewer due to the COLMIL's insufficient resources to cover all the national territory. In Norte de Santander, the FARC launched a wave of attacks on infrastructure and transport and threatened elected officials in the department's 40 municipalities. In Santander, the COLMIL captured nine FARC fighters suspected of a 2005 massacre of 15 soldiers. In Arauca, a sweep of FARC and ELN urban militias yielded 17 arrests, part of an initiative to use law enforcement and the judiciary to defeat urban support networks (ref E). Narino and Putumayo saw fewer COLMIL operations than in the third quarter.

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Success Against Mid-Level Leaders  
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18. (S) In the fourth quarter the COLMIL killed or captured ten FARC and ELN front commanders, six urban militia chiefs, and seven specialists in areas such as narco-finance, political mobilization, and explosives. Also taken down were several notorious leaders known for particular terrorist attacks. Alias 'Fernando Caicedo,' a 25-year FARC veteran, who replaced aka 'Granda' as the FARC's 'foreign minister' equivalent, was arrested in Bogota, while aka 'El Medico,' a leader of the FARC's western joint command and Jacobo Arenas mobile column, was detained in Cauca. Besides removing these veterans from the battlefield, the COLMIL captured documents, computer records, and intelligence on FARC operations (ref F). These mounting successes reflected a deliberate channeling of intelligence resources towards mid-level targets.

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